



We can visualize the Sangha body as a forest. Each member of the Sangha is a tree standing beautifully alongside the others. Each tree has its own shape, height, and unique qualities, but all are contributing to the harmonious growth of the forest. Looking at the trees standing steadily alongside each other like that, you can sense the beauty, solidity, and power of a sacred forest.

—Thich Nhat Hanh, *Joyfully Together: The Art of Building a Harmonious Community*

Dear Still Water Friend,

Thank you for your support of the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center during the past year. For nineteen years, Still Water has been a steadfast presence and resource for mindfulness practice in the Plum Village tradition in the Washington DC area. It has grown from a few members practicing weekly in an attic to a community of more than two hundred practitioners who meet for meditation in eight different locations on most days of the week. Many other people worldwide subscribe to our weekly Dharma topic announcement. All this has been possible thanks to the support of Still Water's members and friends.

What does it mean to live in community? What is a community? It's hard to think of a single book by Thich Nhat Hanh in which he does not talk about the importance of community—in particular, of a spiritual community, a *Sangha*. In *Joyfully Together*, Thay writes:

A Sangha is a community of people...who are walking together on a spiritual path.
A Sangha has a great deal of strength; its members are able to protect each other, to help each other in every aspect of the practice, and to build the strength of the Sangha. We can take refuge in the Sangha in order to succeed in our practice.

A passage from *Teachings on Love* evokes the value of community in times of uncertainty, discord, and divisiveness:

A Sangha is a community of resistance, resisting the speed, violence, and unwholesome ways of living that are prevalent in our society. Mindfulness is to protect ourselves and others. A good Sangha can lead us in the direction of harmony and awareness.

In the spring of 2017, the Still Water Working Group distributed a short survey to Still Water members to try to assess how well our organization was meeting their needs. We received many useful and moving responses. To the question “What is Still Water for you?” people described Still Water as “a spiritual refuge,” “a precious community,” “my family,” “a place where I find myself.”

Many responders expressed appreciation for how the Sangha helps them deepen their practice. One person described it as “a community of sincere practitioners where everyone is a teacher to me.” Another called it “a support system for helping me on my mindfulness path and practice.” A third wrote, “Still Water is a path where I look for peace and spiritual growth. It provides me with a place to come together with others of similar intention, and to share a time of peace, quiet, meditation and discussion with others....It helps me live my life each day in a more loving and compassionate way.”

Some responders wrote about finding refuge in the community at times of personal difficulty and turmoil. One person wrote simply, “I live and love Still Water. It is keeping me alive at the moment.”

People who support Still Water with financial contributions and through their participation are members of our community. We are deeply grateful for your support. As has been true since its inception, Still Water is guided in financial matters by the tradition of Dana, or generosity — a gift from the heart that brings joy and benefit to both the giver and the receiver. Dana enables our community to meet its many expenses, including rent for gathering and retreat spaces; the purchase of books, meditation cushions and mats, and other materials; contributions to Plum Village and other not-for-profit institutions; remuneration for our guest teachers; and a modest salary for our full-time senior teacher, Mitchell Ratner.

Additionally, donations from our supporters enable us to offer regular meditation sessions and many other events free of charge. For fee-based events, we provide a sliding scale of payment and scholarships so that people can practice with us regardless of their ability to pay.

Still Water has always been supported entirely through voluntary donations from its members and friends. All contributions are tax-deductible. In recent years, contributions have been trending downward; in view of this, please be assured that any donation you are able to make will be deeply appreciated.

We invite you to continue supporting us by sending a year-end gift or becoming a monthly donor. We also welcome Dana in non-monetary forms, including help with planning, organizing, and staffing events, as well as with building and maintaining our online and social media presence. Please see the attached page for more information on how to donate and how your contribution will be used. We also invite you to enjoy the gift of community by visiting any of our meditation groups and participating in our Days of Practice, where you will be warmly welcomed. See StillWaterMPC.org for a Monthly Calendar of our activities.

*May all beings be safe. May all beings be happy. May we have strength to meet whatever arises.
May our days unfold with ease.*

In gratitude,

The Still Water Working Group

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